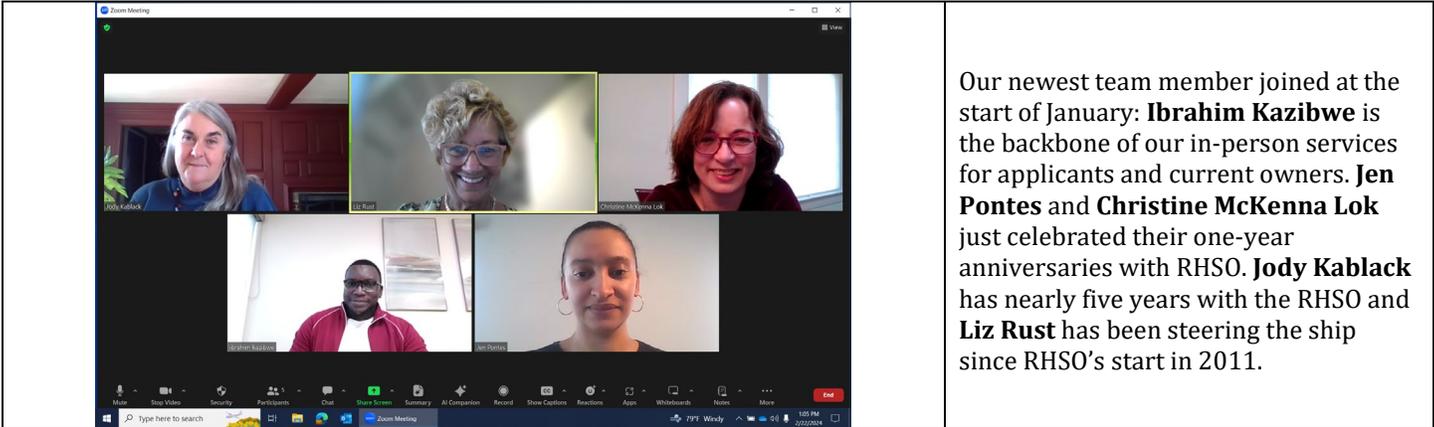




Regional Housing Services Office
March 2024 Newsletter

RHSO Team at Full Headcount!



Housing Grants Available through Community One Stop for Growth

The state has created a central portal for many of its grant programs for housing and community development called [Community One Stop for Growth](#). We want to highlight a few of the grants available through the portal:

- The MassWorks Infrastructure Program includes housing development.
- MassDevelopment's Site Readiness Program can fund construction of housing site-related upgrades like utilities and roadways.
- MassDevelopment's Underutilized Properties Program can fund capital projects and predevelopment of housing sites.
- MassDevelopment's Real Estate Technical Assistance can help municipalities plan future uses and disposition of public surplus property.

These grants are only available to municipalities in compliance with the new MBTA Multi-Family Zoning requirement. The state recommends submitting an Expression of Interest before April 30. Full applications are due by June 5.

The Path to Town Meeting

It will be a busy spring for towns in our service area, as well as across the Commonwealth, that will be voting on 3A (MBTA) Zoning. Lexington passed the new zoning last year, followed by Lincoln and Bedford this month. Acton, Concord, Maynard, Sudbury, and Wayland will vote later this spring, while Natick and Weston are planning for fall votes. Most municipalities are working with consultants funded through planning grants to advance their work.

RHSO Support for Owners of Deed-Restricted Property

In a recent newsletter, we highlighted the marketing and sales of deed-restricted homes that are primarily the responsibility of Jen. Ibrahim has been instrumental in reaching out to existing owners of deed-restricted homes in our service area. If we are serving as the monitoring agent, each year we must certify that the owners are still living in their homes. Owners must contact their monitoring agent before taking out home equity loans or second mortgages to ensure that they understand the current value of their home. Each deed rider contains a formula that ensures the home remains affordable to future owners. Jen will be scheduling a Post-Purchase Training Workshop for later this spring to cover deed riders and other important issues.

RHSO also administers home repair grants that several towns have been able to offer through funding from a local foundation or their municipal budget: Acton, Bedford, Concord, Lincoln, Sudbury, and Weston. Half the towns limit the grants to deed-restricted homes and the other half limit the grants to homes that are below the median assessed value for single-family homes in their municipality.

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April is Fair Housing Month

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, presence of children, or disability. Massachusetts further prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, military or veteran status, age, ancestry, or source of income (e.g. Section 8 vouchers).

Despite laws on the books, we know that residential segregation persists. Earlier this year, the Codman Square Neighborhood Development Center released [Advancing Fair Housing in Greater Boston, Massachusetts: Voices from the Field](#). While some recommendations are aimed at the state level, we wanted to highlight a few suggestions for municipalities: Community Preservation Committees should prioritize balance between open space and affordable housing projects, all members of housing-connected town boards should be trained in fair housing law, and towns should educate local property managers and landlords about the prohibition against discriminating against potential renters who use the Section 8 program.

The WestMetro HOME Consortium (13 municipalities, 5 in the RHSO service area) is sponsoring a two-year Fair Housing testing initiative conducted through the Suffolk University Law School Housing Discrimination Testing Program. To date, 69 tests have been completed across all 13 consortium municipalities, of which 18 (26%) are conclusively discriminatory. The discriminatory tests break out as 11 for source of funds/voucher holder, and 7 are racial. The results have been reviewed with MCAD, and MCAD is in the process of initiating complaints and discovery processes. More information is forthcoming, and a final report will be produced at the initiative's completion. The RHSO is looking at educational opportunities for property managers.

CHAPA (Citizens Housing and Planning Association) is hosting a free Fair Housing [virtual symposium](#) on April 25 from 1 to 3 pm that will feature Codman Square's report along with a keynote by Dr. Michael Akinwumi, whose work for the National Fair Housing Alliance brings an equity lens to the use of algorithms in lending and selecting tenants.

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Save the Date for the 2024 Housing Institute!

The Massachusetts Housing Partnership is busy planning its 17th Housing Institute for local officials to be held in person in Worcester on June 12 and 13. This is a fabulous opportunity for networking with colleagues from municipalities across the state and hearing from leaders in the public, private, and non-profit sectors.



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